



**Testimony Supporting**  
**SB 294, An Act Concerning Housing Protections for Victims of Family Violence**  
**Housing Committee**  
**March 10, 2022**

Good afternoon Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee. The Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC) provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Stamford, Norwalk, New Canaan, Darien, Westport, Wilton, and Weston.

Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

Senate Bill 294 is one of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (CCADV) and DVCC's priority bills. It seeks to prohibit a landlord from taking certain adverse actions against a tenant based on such tenant's family violence victim status.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Survivors face many unique barriers to finding safe and affordable housing because of the actions of their abuser. Financial abuse is present in 99% of abusive relationships, meaning that a survivor may lack access to the family's financial resources, have been forced into un- or underemployment, or had their credit destroyed, all compromising their ability to financially secure housing on their own, apart from their abuser. Survivors may also face a history of evictions or appear on a housing authority's "do not rent list" because of incidents or damage caused by the abuser. Housing instability can have a detrimental impact on survivors and their children, causing additional physical and mental health challenges.

**DVCC's mission** is to provide effective services, support and education for the prevention and elimination of domestic violence across the Connecticut communities of Stamford, Norwalk, Darien, New Canaan, Weston, Westport, Wilton, and beyond.

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### **DVCC Client Story #1**

**A single mother with one child and another on the way was being evicted from her public housing unit, unable to afford the rent after her abuser fled the unit. Complications to her pregnancy, caused by physical abuse, left her unable to work. The victim was temporarily staying with her mother as a last resort. During that time, she received notice that she was off the waitlist for a low-income unit in Stamford. The victim was denied due to her low credit score and had an upcoming appeal. In the meantime, the victim found work as a full-time certified nurse assistant for private households, increasing her income. Advocates worked with the victim on credit repair, established two debt settlement plans to remove collection accounts from her history quickly, and worked with two credit bureaus to have a negative account they were incorrectly reporting removed from her record. After these actions to improve her credit score, with a promise of security deposit assistance, and a character statement from our advocates, the victim was approved to move into her safe and affordable, low-income unit.**

### **DVCC Client Story #2**

**A single mother was working part time at a local deli. She and her child were at imminent risk of being homeless after being abandoned in the unit she shared with her abuser after he fled. The victim's brother was willing to house the victim, but was asking for a very high rent amount and seemed to be taking advantage of the victim's immediate need. The housing & financial advocate worked with the victim's brother, on her behalf. The advocate explained fair market rate, negotiated a fair rent price, and then provided a formal 12-month lease template for both siblings to sign. The advocate also suggested rent receipts for the brother to complete monthly as receipt of rent, and counseled the victim on landlord tenant rights. Finally, the advocate safety planned with the victim so that she felt safe as a domestic violence victim and tenant. After assisting with general advocacy and security deposit funding accessed through the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' (CCEH) Be Homeful funding, the victim was safely moved into her new housing.**

Both of these stories illustrate the critical need for legislation that makes it easier for victims and their children to remain in their current housing. The added expense of moving and the emotional cost to victims and their children of being displaced from their homes compounds their trauma and prolongs their path to building safe sustainable futures. In both of these stories, the temporary nature of both clients lack of funding was directly related to their abusers behavior. This caused them to have to move from apartments they could afford after just a short time. In the second case, the fact that the victim still needed advocacy even though her landlord was also her brother illustrates the critical need for these added protections for domestic violence victims. With legislative support and advocacy services, homelessness can be avoided for domestic violence victims and their children.

Connecticut's highly competitive housing market makes it increasingly difficult for victims to secure affordable housing, especially housing in their current neighborhood where they feel at home, where their children attend school, and where they are close to their support system. It is critical that we find ways to protect a victim's ability to remain safely in existing housing. Victims should not face housing discrimination or eviction because of their abuser's actions. This bill seeks to provide protections for victims related to eviction, increases in rent, refusal to

renew a lease, decreases in services, and violations of lease agreements because of the violence committed against them. It will provide one tool for victims and their children to remain safely housed. We urge the Committee's support with the substitute language offered by CCADV.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Executive Director  
DVCC

Serving the towns of Stamford, Norwalk, New Canaan, Darien, Westport, Wilton, and Weston.